

# CAR CARE



**Routine vehicle maintenance goes a long way toward preventing a road trip crisis.**

THE  
**RECORD**

Supplement  
March 2004



# Classic RV design proves timeless

By DAVE HALLIDAY  
CanWest News Service

CALGARY - In the 1970s, a small fibreglass travel trailer with Ontario's floral emblem embossed on both sides won the hearts of many campers.

A revamped version of the Trillium trailer is making a successful comeback, although the factory now is located in Calgary.

Joe Thoen of Team Trillium Manufacturing calls his new version the Outback. Externally the trailer is little changed - except for updated colours - since Team Trillium is using the moulds used to build the 1970s trailers. However, the interior has been revamped to accommodate modern appliances and to add a feature the originals never had - a bathroom.

Many of the original trailers are still in use and buyers who remember Trillium of the 1970s have provided a ready market for the new units.

When new trailers are trucked to dealers, Team Trillium puts signs in the windows letting people know what it is, where it's going and including phone numbers for both the dealer and manufacturer.

"Everywhere the truck stops, the dri-

ver has 10-15 people coming to look at the trailer," Thoen said.

Trailer buyers have produced a surprise for Thoen.

"When we originally started to build them, I thought they would appeal to 30-to 40-year-olds," Thoen said. Instead, 90 per cent of buyers are over 50.

Dave Hill, sales manager for Arrkann Trailer and RV Centre in Edmonton, one of the top Outback dealers, agreed that many buyers are over 50. Arrkann sold 15 Outbacks in 2003 and expects to sell a similar number this year. Prices start at \$13,995 for the base trailer.

These buyers typically value the compact size and efficiency of the Outback, Hill said, and they're adventurous campers.

These people are RVers who bypass commercial campgrounds because "they want to camp in the middle of nowhere," he said. They like to go into the mountains where they can experience nature and they're not worried if there are no plug-ins.

The self-contained design of the Outback makes that possible since the high efficiency 12-volt fridge will operate for days before the battery needs to

be recharged and the stove and furnace are fired by propane. The fridge uses less power than an RV light fixture.

Hill also finds that automotive hobbyists are attracted to the trailers because they can be towed behind a collector car or street rod and can be painted to match the vehicle.

The moulds to make the recreational vehicles were in Calgary because another man had made an unsuccessful attempt to revive Trillium trailers.

Thoen decided to take on the venture as a way of keeping the staff at his recreational vehicle service business busy over the winter.

Team Trillium now is entering its third year with more than 170 trailers built and has proven so successful that Thoen has doubled his staff to 12 from six. The shop in northeast Calgary builds four trailers a week and planning is underway to expand the building and increase production.

The company now is setting up a dealer network in the northwestern United States to complement those already selling the trailers in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.

Since Team Trillium is using the same moulds used for the original trailer, many of the parts for the new versions such as the specially made door hinges fit the originals.

Thoen said he receives 150 e-mails a week from Trillium owners looking for parts for their vintage rigs. The requests come from across North America - Thoen recently shipped a refrigerator to North Carolina.

The parts' interchangeability extends beyond items such as fridges and door hinges.

When a Trillium owner from Eastern Canada arrived at the shop with his 1970s Trillium disabled by a cracked frame, Team Trillium had a ready-made solution.

Team Trillium workers unbolted the trailer frame, jacked up the body and moved it to a frame built for a new trailer. The body slipped right into place on the new frame.

Although the bulk of the Outback trailers are sold to campers, some have been ordered for use as mobile sales centres. These trailers could be used at outdoor events such as the Calgary

Stampede or Edmonton's Klondike Days.

During a recent visit to the Team Trillium shop, two sales trailers were being prepared. The interiors have a different configuration than the camping trailers and are built without the appliances that would be part of an RV.

In addition, the trailers are equipped with larger, swing-up windows to make it easier to serve customers.

Since the trailers are fibreglass, they could easily be produced in a company's colours - the trailer shell can be manufactured in a wide range of hues.

The Outback is moulded in two halves - a top and a bottom - that are joined together to make a one-piece trailer body. The beltline seam is fibreglassed so that the body becomes a single piece.

The seam is riveted with large washers anchoring the rivets on the inside before the seam is covered with fibreglass. A rubber moulding covers the seam on the outside of the body.

This style of construction produces a very durable trailer - stronger and more leak-resistant than contemporary trailers built with wood framing and covered with aluminum siding. There are no seams in the roof, eliminating a potential source of leaks.

"We've seen Trilliums from 1973 with no water damage," Thoen said.

Thoen personally inspects each trailer before it is shipped to keep quality at a high level. That means fewer repairs and less money spent on warranty claims - helping keep the price low.

Hill said there have been few problems with the trailers and any warranty claims have been handled quickly.

Standard equipment in the trailers includes the fridge, stove and furnace, 25-amp converter with battery charger, roof vent, fire extinguisher and leveling jacks. Options include an awning, screen room, bike carriers, bathroom with flush toilet, hot water heater, stereo system and solar panels.

Looking to the future, Thoen plans to build a prototype of a larger trailer later this year.

For more information on Outback trailers, contact Team Trillium at 1-403-398-8732 or visit the website at [www.trilliumtrailers.com](http://www.trilliumtrailers.com).



Joe Thoen of Team Trillium steps into a completed Outback trailer. Thoen inspects each unit before it is shipped to a dealer.

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# Innovations in paint leave the rust behind

By TONY WHITNEY  
For CanWest News Service

VANCOUVER - When we buy a new vehicle - or even a late-model used one - we pretty well take it for granted that it comes with a really good paint job. Developments in automotive finishing during the last few years have resulted in paint that has impressive durability, along with the ability to retain that "like new" look over many years of use.

This process is certainly no accident. Automakers go to surprising lengths to improve paint finishes, and the results show after a few years of daily vehicle use.

It wasn't too many years ago that paint would deteriorate quite rapidly - especially under extreme weather conditions. During the 1970s and 1980s when automakers started to use painted plastic valances around the bumper areas, it was common to see a vehicle with a few years under its wheels displaying an alarming difference between the finish on the bodywork and the paint on the bumper valances and other moulded components. The fact was that paint technology took a while to catch up with the trend towards the use of composite materials in conjunction with steel.

Nowadays, a vehicle body may use panels made of steel, aluminum and plastic composite all on the same platform. The paint, though, holds up faultlessly, regardless of what it's applied to - even after many seasons of use.

Typically, on a modern vehicle, the paint consists of several layers, each of which has a different job to do. Rust-proofing is a major consideration, of course, so steel panels have to be treated even before the paint layers go on. Automakers commonly use a "zinc phosphate" coating which provides a very effective barrier against rust - even in climates where vehicles are bombarded in wintertime with a constant spray of salt-laden slush.

The zinc phosphate coated bodyshell then gets a coat of primer which provides more corrosion protection, along with a good base for the colour coat itself. These days, most automakers use water-thinnable paints, which are applied electrostatically. In this process, the paint particles in the "dipping tank" are attracted to the bodywork electrically and find their way into every nook and cranny. Viewing the process is interesting because the vehicle body is lowered into what looks like a huge tank of water, but it emerges with an even, flawless, coat of paint. Actually, there are several coats of paint applied using this process from an initial "filler" to the final layers of finish in the colour the customer ordered. Incidentally, metallic finishes are achieved thanks to minute flakes of aluminum blended into the paint.

Modern automotive finishing processes have developed in recent years not only around the need for more effective rust protection, but also to

meet environmental demands. With today's electrostatic dip processes and water soluble finishes, no paint residue escapes into the atmosphere - as it did with the old spray booth techniques. Before the painted bodyshell heads for the assembly lines, it is baked to ensure the finish is as durable and as scratch-resistant as possible.

The final coating is of a clear lacquer ("clearcoat" is the term most often used) and this enhances the glossy look of the vehicle and provides a weatherproof barrier to such hazards as acid rain, tree resin, bird droppings, soot and other hazards our vehicles have to face on a daily basis. It's worth mentioning that good body shops know all about these paint processes and are able to repair vehicles and match the look and durability of the original finish surprisingly well.

Of course, nothing stands still in any corner of the automotive industry and the field of paint finishes is no exception. The people at Mercedes-Benz, which seems to be enjoying a string of innovations right now, have developed a new type of clear lacquer which is claimed to be substantially more scratch-resistant than conventional paint. The lacquer contains minute ceramic particles which harden in the paintshop oven and form a barrier that's very difficult to mar in any way. The process is said to be especially useful in protecting against the ravages of mechanical car wash equipment, al-

though recent "touchless" systems may have reduced this hazard to some extent. Another benefit of the process is an enhanced gloss which is stated to last longer than the shine on most conventional finishes. Mercedes points out that it tested 150 cars over several years with what it calls its "nano-particle clearcoat" and the vehicles displayed better scratch-resistance and a longer-lasting gloss. For the scientifically curious (or the crossword fan), a "nano" is a billionth part of a unit, so the ceramic chips in this coating must be microscopic. The coating is also claimed to offer better protection against chemicals in the atmosphere, which are still a problem in some regions of the country. The coating is being applied to several 2004 Mercedes-Benz models and will more than likely find its way to other DaimlerChrysler group nameplates like Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep.

Of course, rival automakers are no doubt working on paint finish innovations of their own and the results can only benefit consumers. Thankfully, the bad old days when rust perforation was a fact of life after a few years of ownership seem to have gone forever.

(Tony Whitney is an award-winning auto journalist and host of the popular TV show *Driver's Seat*. He writes here on behalf of the New Car Dealers of B.C. He can be reached via e-mail at [whitney\(at\)intergate.ca](mailto:whitney(at)intergate.ca))

## Get your vehicle ready for hot weather

(SOP) Summer's heat, dust, and stop-and-go traffic will take their toll on your vehicle. Add the effects of winter, and you could be poised for a breakdown. You can lessen the odds of mechanical failure through periodic maintenance. Your vehicle should last longer and command a higher resale price, too! Some of the following tips are easy to do; others require a skilled auto technician.

- **Air conditioning.** A marginally operating system will fail in hot weather. Have the system examined by a qualified technician.

- **Cooling system.** The greatest cause of summer breakdowns is overheating. The cooling system should be completely flushed and refilled about every 24 months. The level, condition, and concentration of the coolant should be checked periodically. (A 50/50 mix of anti-freeze and water is usually recommended.) Do-it-yourselfers, never remove the radiator cap until the engine has thoroughly cooled! The tightness and condition of

drive belts, clamps, and hoses should be checked by a pro.

- **Oil.** Change your oil and oil filter as specified in your manual - more often (every 3,000 miles) if you make frequent short jaunts, extended trips with lots of luggage, or tow a trailer.

- **Engine performance.** Replace other filters (air, fuel, PCV, etc.) as recommended - more often when in dusty conditions. Get engine drivability problems (hard starts, rough idling, stalling, diminished power, etc.) corrected at a good shop.

- **Windshield wipers.** A dirty windshield causes eye fatigue and can pose a safety hazard. Replace worn blades and get plenty of windshield washer solvent.

- **Lights.** Inspect all lights and bulbs; replace burned out bulbs; periodically clean dirt and insects from all lenses. To prevent scratching, never use a dry rag.

- **Tires.** Have your tires rotated about every 5,000 miles. Check tire pressures once a month; let the tires "cool down" first. Don't forget your

spare, and be sure the jack is in good condition. Examine tires for tread life, uneven wearing, and cupping; check the sidewalls for cuts and nicks. An

alignment is warranted if there's uneven tread wear or if your vehicle pulls to one side.

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# Food and drink are contributing to motor vehicle accidents

(SOP) What harm could a little sip of coffee, a quick bite of doughnut or a slurp of soup possibly do when there is an experienced driver behind the wheel? Plenty, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in the United States.

The government safety organization found in a recent study of more than 32,000 drivers that eating while driving is a bigger distraction than using a hand-held cellphone. And 26% of all traffic fatalities, it claims, are caused by driver distraction. Now, an insurance company in the United States has compiled a list of the 10 most dangerous foods to eat while driving.

The list was compiled by Hagerty Classic Insurance after the company received a claim from a driver who had so many food-related accidents there was a rider placed on his policy restricting him from driving while eating. It looks at three key accident factors: Degree of distraction, degree of difficulty in eating with only one hand on the wheel and popularity of the food.

Taking top honours on the dangerous foods list is coffee, the morning staple of most Canadian motorists and the reason drive-through eateries are thriving across the country. Uncovered drinks are the greatest offenders and the leading cause of unexpected splashes and spills.

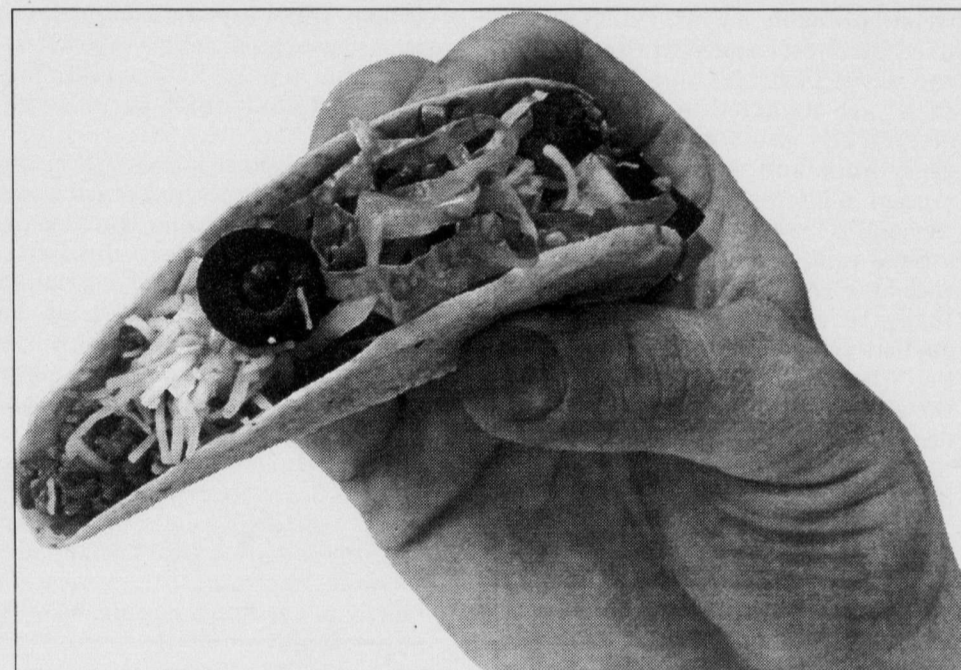
Since few people covet the soiled look, especially en route to the office, there is an automatic attempt to clean up the spill while navigating rush-hour traffic. In addition, coffee often comes at near-scalding temperatures, which can lead to serious burns and serious driver distraction.

Following closely behind coffee, the

other edible offenders are:

- **Hot soup.** Apparently, cream of tomato and chicken noodle are hot in-car snacks. Literally. Of course, juggling a spoon, a steering wheel and a gearshift is a recipe for disaster.

- **Tacos.** One good road bump and the seat of a car looks like a salad bar - a look most drivers will want to rectify right away.



One good road bump and the seat of the car looks like a salad bar.

- **Chili** (and everything chili-topped and chili-filled). Despite driver protestations to the contrary, steering a car around a corner while forking in a mouthful of the spicy stuff requires more dexterity than most humans possess.

- **Hamburgers.** Nothing beats a juicy, mustard-smeared hamburger to force eyes off the road and down the front of a once-clean white shirt. A \$5 hamburger can quickly turn into \$500 worth of repairs.

- **Barbecued foods.** One of the drippiest snack options - and one of the main reasons drivers look away from the road to soiled car seats, spotted suit jackets and sticky gearshifts.

no" very quickly.

- **Soft drinks.** Easily spilled, slopped and slobbered, pop is particularly problematic because it is so popular, especially on hot, sunny days.

- **Chocolate.** The Midas touch - steering wheels, stick shift, clothing and hair - will carry distinctive brown fingerprints. Drivers' instinctive reactions are to clean the offending candy stains immediately, instead of keeping their eyes on the road.

In its informal food study, the Michigan-based insurance company also found more food-related accidents happen in the morning than in the evening, because people are concerned about their appearance on the way to work.

As well, the odds of having a food-related accident can double if the vehicle has a stick shift, since eating, shifting and steering require increased dexterity.

Finally, the company concluded that the most hazardous driving situation is a double combo: Eating and talking on a cellphone.

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# One day, elderly drivers will be called Tyler and Ashley

By ROBERT BOSTELAAR  
CanWest News Service

OTTAWA - The names of the senders - Mabel, Wesley, Harriet - are as much a clue as a tissue box on the parcel shelf or a CAA-Plus membership sticker on the trunk lid. These are people who learned to drive in a less-hurried era.

Even the very fact their messages arrived on paper, in stamped envelopes, betrays the age of these correspondents. Who today but a senior citizen would send an actual letter?

Of course, not every senior relied on such traditional means to comment on the Fit to Drive series in the Citizen's Driving section. Some proved as adept at zapping in e-mail as the younger readers who shared their views. It shows that elderly people can embrace new technology, new ideas.

Emerging technology in cars should help all of us drive longer. Some is as simple as Cadillac's famous clacking turn signal that increased in volume to remind the motorist to cancel after a lane-change. (I haven't noticed this in Cadillacs I've driven lately, however. Maybe the company felt it sent the wrong signal to the younger buying demographic it desires.)

Among the more sophisticated systems, here or coming soon, are sensors to detect objects in blind spots or warn a driver when he drifts out of his lane, cameras to aid someone who has difficulty turning her head when reversing, and adaptive cruise-control systems that help a car move safely in high-speed traffic. Yes, these devices are initially restricted to expensive luxury vehicles, but tend to show up surprisingly quickly in mainstream cars.

And vehicle design is changing to make cars easier to operate, and enter and exit.

When my mother, in her 80s, needed a new car, I was happy to recommend the Ford Focus for its high seating position, tilt-telescope steering column and easy manoeuvrability. At Ford, researchers wear a bulky, padded suit so they can know what it's like to drive when their movement is restricted by age or disability.

Adapting attitudes is as important as

adapting vehicles. Several readers supported the idea of a reverse graduated licence that would restrict its holder from, say, driving on multilane highways, at night or even at the busiest daytime periods, in the same way beginning drivers face restrictions.

Many elderly drivers already practise this type of self-regulation - formalizing it could encourage others to assess their abilities, especially if the restricted licence was offered as an alternative to taking a road test for full privileges. In our series, reporter Marlene Orton described the widespread search by researchers for better ways to evaluate older drivers and help teach them to cope.

There are other, simple changes to make the roads safer. The American Automobile Association is pressing for easier-to-read highway signs with typefaces in upper- and lower-case letters, instead of all capitals.

One 85-year-old respondent to our series asked why, when she reports every two years for her written driver's test and group session, she is never asked about the prescriptions she might be on.

"No matter how many rules are followed," she added, "if one has a reaction to medications, accidents can happen."

All of these ideas can help, but we knew we would hear no magic solutions. Inevitably, driving abilities erode. And for too many older drivers, the story ends badly.

It is in everyone's interest to help elderly drivers stay at the wheel as long as it is safe - as measured in a way that recognizes the type of driving they do and affords them the same leeway others are allowed. Reader after reader stressed how the car is important, even crucial, to a senior's independence and quality of life. When you surrender your licence, they told us, you surrender so much more.

Me? I hope to show more patience, more courtesy, when I see a Kleenex box in a back window or a CAA sticker on the trunk. Someday, these drivers will have names like Robert and Joanne, Tyler and Ashley, and we will hope for similar respect.

## Precautions that should be observed when using tools

**(SOP) • Files should never be used without a handle, because there is always the danger of running the point into the palm of the hand. Files should also not be used as levers or hammers. Files are made with hard temper and are quite brittle, so if hammered, small pieces may fly off and cause severe wounds or loss of eyesight.**

**• Hammers or sledges should be checked to see that the head is attached securely so that it doesn't fly off when the tool is used. When the head of a chisel is mushroomed, it should be thrown away or reground to prevent bits of steel from flying off and causing damage. A shield or helmet should always be worn when grinding.**

**• Pull on the handle of a wrench, rather than pushing on it to prevent the danger of skinning the knuckles. When the jaws of the wrench become worn or sprung, the tool should be disposed of.**

**• Do not point an air gun in the direction of anyone, because the high pressure can blow dirt particles at such high speed that they will puncture the skin or get in the eyes.**



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# Protect yourself from buying a "Lemon"

(SOP) If you've purchased a used vehicle in the past, you may have first taken it to an automotive mechanic to have it checked out. That's a great idea that can save you from "buyer's remorse," but there's actually one other step you may want to consider.

Many autobody or collision repair facilities also offer a "prepurchase" check of used vehicles. This service, for which there may be a fee, can help determine if there is unrepaired or poorly repaired previous damage that could impact the vehicle's value, safety or performance.

A qualified, well-trained collision repair facility can restore both the look and performance of even a badly damaged vehicle. And that repair facility can also determine if a vehicle that may look shiny and great to the average consumer actually has had substandard or unsafe repair work done.

In some cases, a used vehicle that looks like a great bargain is actually a "rebuilt" vehicle that had been declared a total loss after an accident. Possibly the vehicle was damaged by water in a flooded area. A vehicle that has been severely damaged or totaled can be repaired properly, but not all of them are. Having it checked out by a reputable collision repair business could help you avoid surprises after the purchase has been completed. Those surprises can include paint that begins to peel, electrical problems, wheels that cannot be aligned, a trunk or window seal that leaks—or worse yet, structural damage or an airbag system that hasn't been restored to work properly.

While the collision repair facility can do a thorough inspection of a vehicle, there are a number of things consumers can do when checking out a used vehicle:

- Check for a musty smell—an indication of water leak problems or flood damage—inside the car and trunk.

- Make sure your test drive includes a stretch of flat, straight highway. If the car "pulls" or if the steering feels "sloppy," there could be suspension damage that has not been properly repaired. Uneven tire wear may also indicate suspension problems.

- Look at the vehicle's paint from different angles, preferably in good light, when the vehicle is clean and dry. Compare the color match between panels. Run your hand along the door jambs and the hood and trunk jambs. If they feel rough or look dull rather than shiny, the vehicle may have been painted poorly or without these areas properly masked. A bad paint job is not dangerous, but it might not hold up well and may be covering poor quality repair work. This could also result in paint peeling problems later on.

- Ask about the vehicle's history.

Whenever possible, check with previous owners to find out if it was ever involved in a major collision or totaled for any reason. Vehicle histories are also available to the potential buyer from several information providers. If it was, you should have a qualified repair facility make sure it has been repaired properly.

- Look for fluid leaks on the underside of the vehicle, on the engine or transmission, or on the ground beneath the vehicle. Look thoroughly for corrosion on all areas of the vehicle.

Just as you spend some time choosing the right vehicle to purchase, it's a good idea to spend some time choosing the right collision repair business—whether you need a repair facility to check out a used vehicle you're considering for purchase, or you need collision repair work done. In choosing a repair facility, look for evidence that their technicians have been properly trained.

## First aid for your car

(SOP) Everyone knows that it is important to have a basic knowledge of first aid in case of an accidental injury. First aid is used to keep the body functioning as comfortably as possible until

the victim can be taken to a hospital to see a doctor. If a person were to have an accident at home, first aid is a short-term necessity, but if he is picnicking or camping in the wilderness, first aid would be needed to keep the victim functioning for a much longer length of time.

Try to think of the car as a victim of an accident when a breakdown occurs. This, of course, is not a living, breathing body, so it is easy to just shut off the motor and let the car sit until a tow truck arrives to take it off to the hospital (garage)



to be taken care of by a doctor (mechanic). Unfortunately, it is not in the nature of a car to break down while idling in

the drive-way or backing out into the street (although it sometimes happens).

The greatest problems with cars usually occur while in the middle of an intersection, driving through traffic, or on a long trip many miles from home. Since we can't place a sling on the car's wheel

or bandage the battery while we tote it off to the nearest garage for emergency care, it is important that we have some basic knowledge of car repair to keep it going until we can get it to a mechanic for professional care. Anyone can repair many of the breakdowns that a car encounters well enough to drive it to a garage. Some repairs will even solve the problem altogether. In either case, a little basic knowledge of car repair can keep the driver from being stranded.

There are some breakdowns, however, that can't be repaired by the driver. Even so, just knowing the symptoms of the car breakdown can save money, because a mechanic that thinks you know what you're talking about is not so apt to overcharge you.

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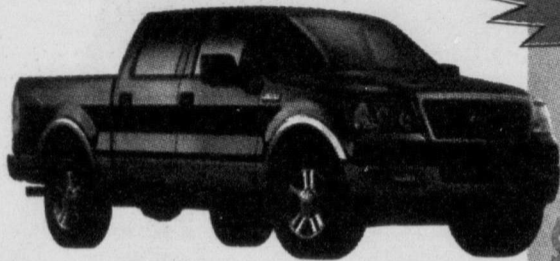
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# The family vacation

(SOP) Today, finding quality time together as a family is becoming more difficult. With demands from work, school and outside commitments, families are finding fewer opportunities to be together.

One good way to spend time with your family is to drive instead of fly to the next vacation spot or family holiday gathering. Not only will this save money; it will give you and your family the opportunity to spend more time together while seeing the country.

All trips require planning, from hotel or campground reservations to the trip itinerary. In order to make the most of your next family road trip you'll need to spend some time preparing routes, outlining your agenda and making sure that your vehicle is in tip top shape. By following a few simple suggestions, your family vacation is bound to be a success.

Things to consider before the trip include checking and filling oil and other fluids and making sure your windshield wiper blades are working properly. Cooling system hoses should be checked and replaced if necessary, and the thermostat should be operating properly. Coolant or antifreeze should be drained and re-filled at manufacturer recommended intervals. To ensure your family's safety, properly inflate tires to recommended manufacturer specifications and replace those that show excessive wear. Have your brakes checked to verify that they are operating properly. It is always important to make sure headlights, turn signals and brake lights are also in proper working condition.

No amount of preparation for the family trip can prepare you for the disaster of an accident. When driving anywhere, there is always a chance that one

could occur. If an accident does happen, whether on vacation or not, pull off the road as far as possible and remember to close any doors that are next to traffic. Turn on hazard lights to notify other drivers that your vehicle is disabled or that there is an emergency. Remember to keep all objects (like flat tires, jacks or luggage) off the road and never accept a ride from anyone other than a police officer. Even the most sincere looking people may turn out to be dangerous. If you have a cell phone, call the police for help.

Make sure there are no injuries. If medical attention is needed, call for help. If no one is hurt, notify the police and fill out an accident report. An accident report will help you when dealing with your insurance company. It is important to fill this out even if there is no obvious damage to your car; it will help to ensure that hidden damage is accounted for.

After completing the police report, notify your insurance company as soon as possible;



some companies require notification within 24 hours of the accident. Your insurance company will work with the other parties involved to ensure that the claims process is handled properly. They will also estimate the damage to the vehicle, so you know what to expect when having it repaired.

Your insurance company may give you options on where to take your vehicle, or you may want to choose your own repair shop. If you are responsible for choosing a repair facility, choose one that is current in technology and training.

While planning your trip, make a checklist of items you will need. A few necessities might include:

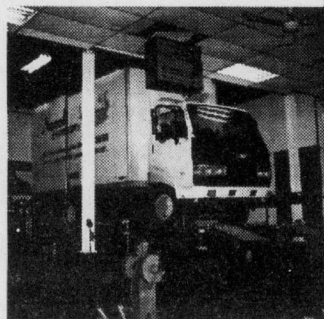
- Directions to your destination and any necessary maps
- Telephone numbers you will need on the trip
- Glasses and/or contact lenses for all drivers
- Sunglasses
- Flashlight and spare batteries
- Car insurance information
- Medical insurance information
- Names of people to be contacted if you are involved in an emergency situation
- Necessary cash, credit cards and/or traveler's checks
- Passports and/or other necessary identification information
- Medications that may need to be taken regularly
- A cell phone for emergencies; if you are the driver, be sure to pull off the road when using your cell phone.

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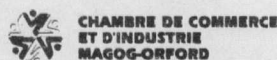
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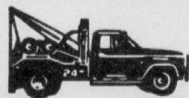
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# Emergency stops

(SOP) A sudden emergency, such as loss in steering control, does not give the driver time to consult a manual or even to ask questions. The driver will need to know what to do immediately in such situations, and may gain some knowledge by studying the emergency measures listed below:

**1. A tire suddenly blows out:** Steer the car as straight as possible, but do not slam on the brakes. Apply even, gentle pressure to the brake pedal. Then pull off the road slowly onto the shoulder. Try to park the car on level ground.

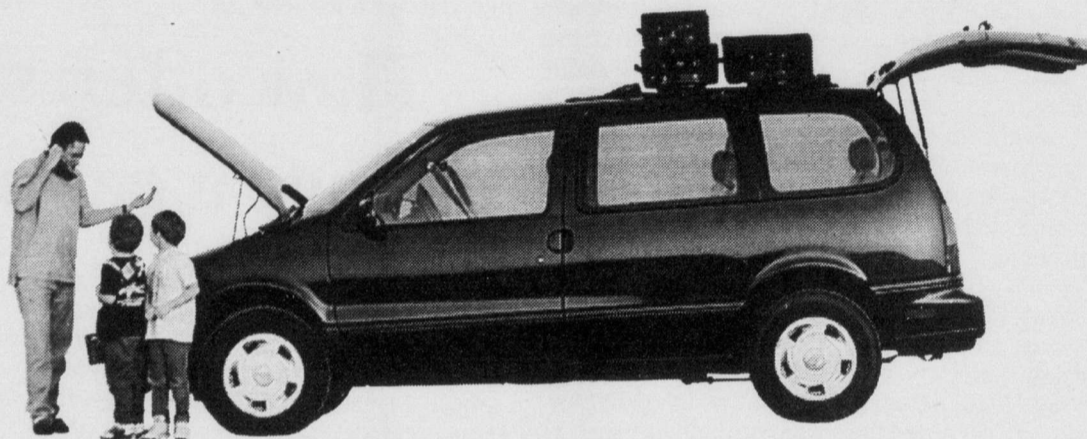
**2. The brakes give out:** If you have time, quickly pump the brake pedal; this may tighten up the brake and provide some stopping power. If there is not time for this, apply the parking brake slowly but firmly. Another method that can be used if there is time and pumping doesn't help is to shift down on the gears - from Drive to D-1 and then to D-2. You may even have time to shift into reverse. Do not shift into "park," however. You might turn off the ignition with the car in gear. DO NOT turn the key into the lock position, because this will lock the steering wheel. If none of these procedures work, try to sideswipe guardrails, signposts, or other obstructions that will slow the car. Direct hits may cause serious injury, however, so be careful.

**3. Lights go off:** If the lights should suddenly go off at night, try the hazard lights immediately. Even directional signals will produce some light. At the same time, brake the car slowly and pull off the road and stop. DO NOT jam on the brakes. You have plenty of time and space in which to brake to a stop safely unless you are on a hair-pin curve on the side of a mountain.

**4. Steering locks or gives out:** Apply the brakes gently. Do not slam on the brakes, because it may cause the car to swerve. Turn on the hazard lights and blow the horn to warn other drivers of

the danger. Get off the road as soon as possible.

**5. Accelerator sticks:** Turn off the engine, shift to neutral, and pull off the road. Power steering and brakes will become manual, so more effort is necessary to turn and stop. You may now try pulling the pedal up with you foot or hand. Stuck pedals are usually due to broken springs or a blockage in the throttle linkage. Sometimes, an item such as a floor mat may be pressing on the pedal. If you cannot find the solu-



tion to the problem, call a tow truck. DO NOT drive the car if you can't solve the problem.

**6. Hood flies up:** Look under the space below the hood or stick your head out of the window to see. Gently apply the brakes; do not slam them on. Use signals to turn off the road. The hood latch is probably broken. If you can't tie the hood down with wire, rope, or a necktie, call a tow truck for help. If the hood latch was not completely latched, you may be able to close it down and drive on. If you can't see, don't drive.

**7. Car drops into deep water:** If the windows are electric, open them immediately and hang on tight-

ly to the steering wheel, dash, car seat, door handles or whatever is stable for a handhold. Wait until the car fills up with water and then swim through the windows. If the windows are crank operated, wait until the car is almost filled with water; then crank the windows down to escape. There will be enough air between the water and the bottom of the car roof to supply your breathing needs. The windows are always the best means of escape, because the doors have too much water pressure

get as low in the car as possible - below the windows and the windshield.

**10. Electric power cable:** If you're in the car and a power cable, is on your car, stay in the car until help arrives.

**11. Bee in the car:** Gently brake the car to a stop on the shoulder of the road. Don't slam on the brakes; the car behind you might run into you and cause worse problems than a bee sting. After stopping, roll down the windows and coax the bee out of the car.

**12. Sudden window fogging:** If the fogging problem is outside the car, turn on the windshield wipers. If it's inside the car, wipe the glass with your hand and brake gently to pull the car off the road. Turn on the defroster and wait until you have clear vision before continuing to drive.

**13. Car skids:** DO NOT slam on the brakes! In fact, stay off the brakes completely. Ease off the gas and steer the car in the direction that you want the "front" of the car to go.

**14. Wheels fall into low shoulder:** Brake gently to slow the car when the wheels go off the road. Don't jerk the steering wheel. Ride on the shoulder until the car can be turned onto the road. This prevents skidding.

**15. Engine quits:** Shift the car into neutral gear and coast onto the shoulder of the road, braking gently. Cars with power brakes and power steering will need more effort than normal.

**16. Whatever the circumstances, buckle up for safety!**

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# How did your suspension survive the winter?

After the long months of extreme cold, the warm weather should arrive any time now. But the annual beating of the cars, brought to you by your local roadway, is already kicking into gear.

With the warmer temperatures on the way it's time to start thinking about how your vehicle has survived yet another winter. After months of cold and ice come the cracks, humps and bumps of spring, and your car may be feeling the strain. Maybe a new noise has developed, or maybe all of that bouncing around has killed your shocks once and for all.

While the temptation may be to let things be until the region's roads have stopped heaving all over the place, doing so could compromise both your safety and the life expectancy of your car. The wear and tear of the last few months, combined with the strain of rough roads now can add up to trouble, not to mention expense.

First off, let's take a look at your shock absorbers: Shocks are used to control the spring action of a car. For example, your front wheel drops into a hole in the road, then bounces up sharply as it comes out of the hole. The shock absorber works by forcing oil from one chamber into another through a re-

stricted opening, slowing down the movement of the suspension. By doing so it slows down and controls the bounce of the spring, absorbing the harshness of hitting the bump. Gas shocks work in a similar fashion, but use a combination of fluid and compressed gas.

While we tend to think of shock absorbers as comfort items, they are also vitally important to maintaining control. That's because while they are absorbing the bumps and humps they are also keeping your wheels firmly on the ground, where they belong.

In some cases one blown shock can feel worse than two. That's because when a shock on one side is still doing its job and the one on the other side isn't, the car seesaws around, giving the sensation that the car is out of control. It can be a scary feeling, like the wheels aren't firmly attached to your car.

Along with your shocks there are several other suspension components that should be checked. A vehicle's suspension is made up of a number of bushings and ball joints, all designed to keep the wheels going in a straight line, only turning when you want them to.

One of the main components in suspension bushings is rubber. This allows for further cushioning, protecting both

you and your car while allowing a limited amount of flexibility. But rubber doesn't last forever, especially with the salt and slush of winter eating away at it.

That corrosion-causing salt can get into metal suspension parts as well, forming rust, leading to further problems.

If anything, these parts are even more important than the shocks. When a bushing or ball joint fails, the wheel will go wherever the forces of physics take it, which is usually not where you want it to go. At this point a crash is likely, if not inevitable.

If any parts need to be changed, an alignment may be required afterwards. In basic terms an alignment is an adjustment of the suspension to ensure the wheels are all going in the same direction. Failing to do so will wear tires out quickly and can make your vehicle consume a surprising amount of fuel. Not a good plan in an era of 89 cent-a-litre gas.

While most drivers don't give their suspensions much thought on a regular day, all of those bushings, ball joints bearings and shocks do the vitally important job of ensuring you get safely to your destination.

## How often should you change a car's anti-freeze?

By Jeremy Cato and Mike Howells

My question concerns the change interval of anti-freeze. I want to be certain that I have good summertime and winter protection. When should I flush and change anti-freeze? When I do flush the system, I also change all hoses and I use distilled water as opposed to tap water.

My second question concerns synthetic engine oil. I have always changed my oil and filters every 5,000 km. I use a very good quality oil, which I have heard contributes to longer engine life and better fuel economy.

**Answer:** Typically, the change interval for conventional ethylene glycol-based coolant runs 40,000-50,000 km, or about two years. Whichever comes first.

Now you don't want to let your coolant go more than about two years before giving it a flush. The chemicals in coolants tend to begin breaking down at that point, which means less engine protection.

Coolant won't lose its freeze protection. But the additives that prevent corrosion, the killer of cooling systems, start fizzling out.

That means things inside your engine are no longer completely safe from breaking down. Lots of shops see a parade of radiators come crumbling in for lack of care. Don't join that parade.

And don't forget that coolant - or what people often call anti-freeze - also protects your engine in hot weather. It increases the boiling point of the water inside your radiator.

All those cars you see boiling over as they pull into the toll booth on the Coquihalla Highway, many of them have old coolant with a low boiling point.

Which brings me to mixing. You never want to go with 100 per cent anti-freeze in the radiator. For a Vancouver climate you want a 50/50 mix, water and coolant. Distilled water is best, but

in a soft-water place like Vancouver, tap water works okay.

If you live in, say, Edmonton, you might want to go for a 70/30 coolant/water mix. But drain that out in the summer and go back to 50/50.

Good idea to look after your hoses, but don't forget the pressure cap. You see, adding pressure to the cooling system increases the boiling point. Now why do you want to do that? To protect your engine during those hot Coquihalla climbs. Rad caps are cheap insurance, so change it with your hoses.

Let's talk about synthetic oil. Essentially, it starts out in life as regular motor oil, and then the oil makers blend in a pile of what they call "well engineered" additives. Personally, I don't think the average person needs to pay the price for synthetic oil. Most people just don't drive in the extreme conditions where these oil shine brightest.

Although some manufacturers - Porsche among them - do require synthetics. The point I want to make here is that the U.S. military uses synthetic oil in its jets in the Arctic because of the extreme environment. Most people don't torture their cars like that.

And those would be for people who really push the limits. If you tow a big, heavy trailer, by all means throw in some high-priced oil. Or if you do a lot of extreme driving - racing, off-roading, what have you - you might want to go the synthetic route. Four or five litres of synthetic oil is cheaper than a whole new engine.

One other thing I want to warn you about. There are a lot of detergents in synthetic oils. If you haven't maintained your engine, you do not want to use a synthetic. It could wash all the dirt off the inside of the engine and plug up the oiling system. That spelled the end of an engine for a co-worker of mine.

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# The shiny, new Edmonston at a book-lot near you

By Robert Bostelaar

Phil Edmonston is a car company. Here's proof:

- Every year he puts out a flashy new model - with much of its content carried over from the previous year.

- Some of that content is very good. Most is serviceable. Bits can be shamefully bad.

- In recent years, that content has also served as foundation for additional, different-looking models.

- The latest such spinoff is aimed at a younger buying demographic and described as a "crossover."

OK, Phil Edmonston is not a car company. The longtime consumer advocate and author of the Lemon-Aid franchise of guidebooks is in fact a thumbtack in the treads of the auto industry. But even he laughs at the similarities.

"If I were following up on this question, I'd ask, 'Have you ever written a lemon?'" he said recently. The answer, which he also happily supplies, is yes. He says his first book 32 years ago, which attacked Allstate Insurance and Esso's diagnostic clinics, "was so over the top."

Does this retrospection mean Edmonston is mellowing? We might think so, judging by *Car Smarts: Hot Tips for the Car Crazy* (Tundra Books, \$22.99). Co-authored with Maureen Sawa, this book is intended for the 14-and-up group (but not to the exclusion of others looking for an automotive primer - hence the crossover label).

Short on bombast, long on context, *Car Smarts* is cheerful and deceptively thoughtful as it examines the world of the automobile, and the automobile's place in the world.

And it's not just the tone that's different. With a bright cover, airy layout and neat, retro-'50s illustrations by Gordon Sauve, *Car Smarts* is Lexus-glossy next to the Skoda-grey Lemon-Aid series.

Most likely, the moderating factor was not age but Sawa, the Hamilton Library co-ordinator and head of the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians. Could you think of a more perfect foil for freewheeling Phil than a look-it-up, get-it-right children's librarian?

"Phil and I had quite the journey in getting this book produced," his writing partner confides.

When Tundra approached her about teaming with Edmonston on a book for kids, she was happy to accept.

"I knew there was no book like this on the shelf. Absolutely nothing," she explains. "There are a lot of books about cars that have lots of nice pictures and not very much information, and a lot of books that are very heavy on text and not much fun to read."

"What we were looking for was

something that would be fun."

It is fun, balancing factoids on car name origins and the source of "that new car smell" with weightier discussions on how to research before buying, and why we must steer manufacturers into building less polluting and wasteful vehicles.

Even the Edmonston clangers that did slip in don't seem to hurt it much.

Although, Phil, you should know that BMW, not Volkswagen, owns Rolls-Royce (VW owns Bentley), Jaguar hasn't built a V-12 engine in this century, and nobody ever made a "Chevy Sunbird."

Yes, errors happen in cars, books and newspapers. But what about such impenetrable statements as "I lower gears help the engine to turn faster to produce more power and conserve fuel" or "when they are trying to ensure that a car is completely 'in tune,' auto mechanics typically look first to four main areas: the engine, the transmission, the wheels, and the chassis."

An out-of-tune chassis is a terrible thing.

True, I'm sensitive. This is, after all, the same author who once introduced a section on newspaper car columnists with, "Speaking of prostitution . . ."

Like a stuck speedometer, Edmonston isn't always wrong. There's plenty to criticize in the lavish junkets automakers put on for favoured car writers (even if newspapers like this one forbid staff, if not freelance contributors, from accepting such freebies).

And there remains much to criticize in the way cars are built and marketed, a task Edmonston eagerly accepts as he rips into Daimler-Chrysler for television ads in which a burger-flipper fantasizes about street-racing and cheerleaders.

"It's sexist and it's encouraging an illegal act," he says. "But the third thing - if you ever do that in a Chrysler vehicle, what happens to your warranty?"

Spoken like a true champion of the consumer I who knows how to pick his spots.

Once a NDP member of Parliament (and the only New Democrat ever elected federally in Quebec), Edmonston holds dual U.S.-Canadian citizenship and these days mostly represents the good people of Florida.

With the Internet, it doesn't matter where you live. Quality control may be Edmonston's weakness, but his strength is his ability to push emerging issues - whether it's engine sludge in Toyotas or faulty ignition coils in Volkswagens - into public view. Email, owners' forums and his own website just help him do it quicker.

If not for this year's model, then next year's, for sure.

CanWest News Service



Phil Edmonston and Maureen Sawa teamed up to write *Car Smarts: Hot Tips for the Car Crazy*, a book aimed at fixing people.

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